

STATE OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Health Advisory: Diarrheal Illnesses Associated with Seneca Lake State Park
Preventing Further Spread of Illnesses at Day Care Centers

Dear Child Day Care Center Directors:

As you are probably aware from the news media reports, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and local health departments are investigating a large outbreak of gastrointestinal illnesses associated with Seneca Lake State Park. As of August 19, 2005, there have been over 2,200 reports of diarrheal illness from individuals who visited the park between June and August 15.

The most common symptoms reported by individuals are diarrhea, abdominal cramping, nausea, vomiting, fever, headache, and loss of appetite. Several of the cases have been confirmed to have cryptosporidiosis, although testing for other possible causes of disease is pending. The usual incubation period (time from exposure to onset of symptoms) for cryptosporidiosis is 7 days, but can range from 2 to 14 days. Persons infected with cryptosporidiosis shed the oocysts in stool for an average of 7 days after symptoms resolve.

During this time period of significant increased diarrheal illnesses in the community, day care centers should ensure the following infection control measures are carefully followed to help prevent the spread of cryptosporidiosis and other diarrheal illnesses in your facility.

- Children in day care centers who have diarrhea (one or more loose stools) must be sent home and advised to seek medical attention.
 - Children who have been diagnosed with *E. coli* O157, *Shigella*, or *Salmonella* must be excluded until clearance is obtained from the local health department.
 - Children who have recovered from diarrheal illness (and **not** diagnosed with the illnesses above) may return to day care provided that they no longer have symptoms and are counseled regarding careful handwashing practices.

- Day care staff with diarrhea should be excluded from food preparation activities.
- Day care staff should ensure that all children practice careful handwashing after each toilet visit and before handling food for themselves or others. Day care staff should ensure that there are adequate supplies of liquid soap and paper towels for handwashing.
- Day care centers should clearly separate diapering and food-handling areas and responsibilities. Disposable gloves should be used when changing diapers, and disposable paper should be used to cover diaper-changing areas. Hands should be washed thoroughly after removing disposable gloves.
- If one or more cases of gastrointestinal illness are identified in your center, water play activities should be temporarily suspended, particularly among diapered-aged children. This includes child wading pools, water tables and other communal water-based activities.
- If a person with gastrointestinal illness associated with Seneca Lake State Park is identified in your day care center, enhanced environmental disinfection measures are needed. No disinfectant is guaranteed to be completely effective against *Cryptosporidium*. However, hydrogen peroxide (3%) is usually effective. Day care centers should clean and disinfect toys, tabletops, and high chairs at least twice daily. Diaper-changing areas should be disinfected after each use. Dishwasher-safe toys may be washed in a commercial dishwasher that has a dry cycle or a final rinse that exceed 113° F for 20 minutes, or 122° F for 5 minutes, or 162° F for 1 minute. Cloth toys may be washed and heat-dried in a clothes dryer for 30 minutes.

The day care center director should discuss the symptoms of gastrointestinal illnesses with staff and stress the need to report illness to the director at the first sign of the disease. The local health department should be notified immediately of any increases in diarrheal illnesses.

If you have any questions, please contact your local health department. We thank you for your efforts to prevent additional spread of illness in day care centers.